

NEW TRENDS IN CALIFORNIA DANCING

Since last year, a change has taken place among the North Californian folk dancers. One type of dance is markedly lacking . . . Russo-Ukrainian. Until last year, anything a Californian did appeared Russian, regardless what it might have been. It is not due to the war or red-herring hunt. Most likely it is due to two main reasons and a few other factors. The Californians are getting older (and wiser). Those who were 30 years old 10 years ago, are now 40. Those who were 40 are now 50, etc. They can't do anymore continual prisiadkys and hilarious kazatskis. The bones creek and the heart is weaker. Meanwhile, they have discovered that there are nationalities in this world whose dances can afford a world of fun without need of getting heart failures and collapsing on the middle of the floor, or leaving it panting and pale. The pendulum swung back, to a bit too much in the opposite direction. It seems to be hard for a Californian to strike an "Oriental" middle path, or, happy medium. They moved away from group dancing and prowess exhibitionism toward couple dancing and the elegant polish of ballroom floors which smacks with Arthur Murray and Veloz-Yolanda brand of dancing. One thing is certain, it is not folk dancing, but round dancing and the reincarnation of the gay 90 period minus (at least temporarily) the Can Can. Two thirds of the dance programs are period ball room dances, mostly old English. They are either creations or numbers originally taught by Harold Evans of Victoria, B. C., Canada, or, they are dances done as they were by the "elite" of post Victorian England. Others are recent creations of the last few months or years which follow practically the same pattern of "walk-point-turn-waltz" (or two-two-step). Many dances were handed down freshly baked either in Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma or Southern California. The elegant ones come from Colorado, while the "five foot four Jessies come from the great plains of Texas and Oklahoma. The Texas ones seem to portray the choreographers "improving (??)" on the Road To The Isles" theme, while those from Oklahoma do the same on "Cotton Eyed Joe".

The most ambitious of the creations is the Amanor Waltz, which, along with all others, has the patronage, encouragement, blessings and propagation of the Federation and Publication which features compositions in successive editions. The amanor was created in a humble basement. Since the music is a pretty Norwegian waltz, and Americans did the creating, hence the dance received the coined and hyphonated name of "Amanor" from "American-Norwegian". It is a dance fitting for suave dancers of a fancy nitery, with no repetition of pattern. It has tango and other steps of that caliber — everything but folk spirit. All other dances are also of the very same air, only the previous folk background of the dancers still succeeds in uniting the assemblages into the common bond of the "folk". If the present trend keeps up, then folk dancing is in its last throes and it is clearing the path for the so called "social" type of ball room dancing where no folksy mixing exist, but a snobby formality.

Let us hope that the present trend is a searching for a happy medium, and the pendulum will not swing to violent extremes, but, instead, will sway evenly and harmoniously and capture some of the true spirit destined through the medium of the folk dance which will bring races and peoples together in happy communion

each other. May we learn to do the dances of old with due respect for their age sans molesting their original beauty. May those dances teach us their fascinating stories of a hoary past and acquaint us with the true backgrounds of the various nations who otherwise would have been total strangers and unknown entities to us. The Californians have the opportunities and the means and they are a wonderful tribe of people. With knowledge comes enlightenment and enlightenment will lead them straight.

VFB



The 1950 Staff of the College Of The Pacific
Folk Dance Camp in Stockton, Cal.

Front row: (left to right) Morry Gelman, Minneapolis, Minn. folk dance leader who also brought with him a delegation of 21 Minnesotans to the camp; Madeline Greene, one of the noted folk dance figures in San Francisco; Ralph Page from Keene, N. H., author of books on the New England dances and editor of the NORTHERN JUNKET; Mrs. Mildred Buhler, the moving spirit of Redwood City folk dancers; Jack McKay, Square Dance caller from the Bay Area; Walter Grothe, Austrian born and twice president of the Californian federation; Maria De Carli, charming interpreter for Senor Carlos Rosas (next) from Mexico City who taught the dances of his native Mexico and won the hearts of those present. Sandy Tepfer, caller formerly of the Bay Area who now teaches physics in a Nevada University; Carolyn Mitchell, a well loved square dance caller from Los Angeles.

Back row: Mr. and Mrs. A. C. (Ace) Smith, a charming couple and folk dance leaders in and around Salinas; Mr. and Mrs. Lawton Harris, the Methodist theologian and his dear wife "Sally", both of whom love folk dancing, and everyone, in turn, loves them; Vera Holleuffer, a soft voiced and ever smiling caller from the Bay Area and a "Swing Gater"; Ye VILTIS editor, Vytautas Beliajus; Robert (Bob) Osgood, caller from the L. A. Area and editor of SETS IN ORDER, a square dance magazine; Mr. and Mrs. George Murton, he, the newly elected president of the Californian Federation, a person with a winning personality; Mr. and Mrs. Les Geiger, barely a month since their wedding and still seeing stars in the day time. Les was Mr. Harris's right hand man; Mr. and Mrs. Herb Greggerson, well known callers from El Paso and the rest of Texas. He won over Californians for Texas. Mr. Greggerson is also the editor of FOOT 'N FIDDLE. Not in the picture is Miss Lucille Czarnowski, the lady of high repute who held and is still holding high positions with the Federation; Grace West, folk dancer and pianist par excellence and Gracie Perryman, full verve, rhythm and dancing feet (did I leave anyone out?).

25,000 WATCH FOUR THOUSAND PRESENT DANCE FESTIVAL

Utah University's Stadium, in Salt Lake City, was the scene on June 16th of a spectacular dance festival. 4000 Mormon teen-agers and their six hundred teachers covered the entire arena of the stadium. Their multi-colored outfits (not costumes) vied with the riotous colors of Utah homesteads where their flower gardens and richly-hued dense rose bushes also present a spectacle to behold and marvel at. This annual event was the largest the Mormons ever presented and the participants arrived from many far flung states — 136 Stakes, in Mormon terminology. As is the custom with the Latter-Day Saints (LDS), nothing is ever done without prayer, and after the 4000 dancers massed the field and the American flag was raised, a prayer opened the festival.

I have been accustomed to encounter opposition to even certain types of folk dancing by a great many Protestant groups to whom dancing is sheer sin. The Latter-Day Saints, in contrast, went overboard to present the type of dance which would cause great alarm to fundamentalist believers. The entire program was devoted practically entirely to social dancing and hep-cat stuff. This perplexed me greatly. Social dancing has its place and should not be excluded from dancing. At the same time, because of the character of social dancing — its tendencies to develop anti-social attitudes and exhibitionism, it should not be encouraged to such a degree by a church which stresses character building. The few, so called, "Western Round dances" were also of the couple type: Black Hawk Waltz, Cotton-eyed Joe, Tree Step, The Waltz You Saved For Me, and Laces and Graces. These mentioned dances were performed fairly well enough, considering many things, but the greatest majority of the dancers were not suited for Rhumbas, fancy Tangos, Sambas and Spanish Fiesta rhythms. They are a type of dance which needs native rhythm and plenty of years of training. The Dance dramatization, "M.I.A. Learns To Dance", was what they teach in neighborhood schools: a cavortive type of chorus-like carryings-on. All of that stuff is fine and good, but it belong to an entirely different atmosphere, not a festival of this nature.

Some patterns were undeniably pretty, particularly the number called "Original Floor Show", where 26 different Stakes presented each one their own interpretation of figure waltzing to the tune of the "Merry Widow Waltz". In a way, one didn't know whom to watch because of the conglomeration, but the color scheme and the pattern they designed on the huge field, was interesting.

136 Stakes covered the field to present several square and round dances. Bad as some squares were, this was more on the order that should have prevailed through the entire evening. The Los Angeles area had several squares on the stage and did an excellent job with their California Tripple Star, called by Lionel Hansen. Colorful was the Rhumba Fantasy with lights playing on the variegated costumes affecting a shimmering from an over-exaggerated hip movement. Umatila Indians from Portland, Oregon, presented three tribal dances.

There were three dramatic points in the whole evening: 1) the entrance when the 4000 dancers surged on and covered the field; 2) the fiesta scene when a thousand or so girls spelled out the word "Fiesta" (two groups facing two directions spelled the same word. And then came their dance to "Adios Muchachos Companeros"); the Finale, when colorful designs of circles, stars and crosses patterned the field. It was colorful, but the 25,000 spectators would have really had a thrilling evening had they seen a folk festival, which is truly spectacular, recreational and exuberant. Perhaps due to the fact that there are no people with any folk dance knowledge but plenty of ball-room dance teachers, that type of program was stressed.

The Mormon church should, nevertheless, get the highest praise for encouraging dancing in its wards (churches) and for its untiring work with the youth. I doubt whether there is any other organization, religious or secular, which devotes so much time and energy to its youth as does the Latter-Day Saint church. VFB.



Organic girls dancing the English favorite, "Lumps of Plum Pudding". All the decorations, including the dying of the banners, is student work. (Foto by John Harvey Campbell)

ORGANIC FOLK FESTIVAL

In Fairhope, Ala.

by Warren Stezel

That folk dancing has lost none of its appeal was well demonstrated again this year in Fairhope, Alabama, when students of the School of Organic Education presented their annual Spring Festival.

All the students in the school, from first grade through high school, participated in the festival program. The attitude they took toward their dancing was expressed perfectly by a first grader, who, after his group had finished their part of the program, gleefully approached his dancing instructor, "What dance are we going to do next, Miss Helen?" Miss Helen Baldwin was stumped.

Spectators marvelled at the enthusiasm and the stamina of the high school dancers, some of whom danced twenty-five dances. Warren Stezel, high school instructor, complains that he had a terrible time holding the program to any reasonable length. Giving up dances they loved did not come easily for the young people.

When the dancers gave their afternoon program of English dances on the lawn, more than 200 spectators sat under a hot Alabama sun to watch them. With the exception of a couple of dances done by the smaller children, the afternoon program was entirely English.

For many years the country and Morris dances of England (since 1908) have been an Organic tradition.